



Peng Lee, of HomeSafe Inspection, uses his thermal imaging camera during a home evaluation. His infrared and acoustic sensor technology allows inspectors to see and hear through the walls, floors and ceilings, uncovering flaws mere visual inspection may miss such as hidden water leaks, faulty wiring, termites and even places where energy is being lost. HomeSafe now has three franchises in Shelby County.

By Karen Pulfer Focht

New insight on inspections

HomeSafe sensors detect flaws

By Jane Roberts

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Home inspectors have only two eyes like the rest of us, and when it comes to buying a home, lots of people would pay for deeper insight.

HomeSafe Inspection uses infrared and acoustic sensors to see and hear through the walls, floors and ceilings, uncovering flaws mere visual inspections may miss — water leaks, faulty wiring — even places where energy is being lost.

Termites are a dead giveaway. In HomeSafe's acoustic equipment, they sound like an army gnawing on Fritos.

"That sound is very disturbing to homeowners," said Kevin Seddon, president of the Oxford, Miss.-based HomeSafe. "When they hear that, they say, 'How long do I have?'"

While infrared technology isn't new to the home inspection business, it's never been as mobile or paired with the acoustic component HomeSafe offers.

Peng Lee, HomeSafe's vice president of technology, originally developed it at the National Center of Physical Acoustics at the University of Mississippi for pest control. Seddon quickly saw the potential in the home inspection market.

"We can find structural problems and insulation deficiencies," he said. "We can find mice and rats. We've been called in to find rac-

coons stuck and skunks stuck in vents."

In Shelby County, HomeSafe charges about \$300 to inspect a 2,000-square-foot home, said Margaret King, director of sales.

For an annual home protection plan, HomeSafe charges \$150 for the same square footage, testing homes for hazards to children or senior citizens.

"We'll come back up to three times in a year," King said. "So if a storm hits and people think they've got a leak, they can find out for sure."

HomeSafe is making a buzz in real estate. It's on the Crye-Leike referral list, and longtime broker Ed Beasley is getting calls.

"I'd be inclined to call these people in if a problem shows up on a routine inspection," he said.

Don Merritt, president of the American Society of Home Inspectors, said the industry has long used technology, including ultrasound tests.

"Infrared has been around forever," he said, "but it used to require 20 to 30 degrees' difference in temperature to get a good reading."

It doesn't anymore.

If the average home inspector can see 33 percent of the home, infrared capacity exposes another 30 percent, Seddon said.

"This has saved many, many house deals because it can ascertain the extent of the damage," he said. "If you have a stain in the

HOMESAFE INSPECTIONS

- **Top executive:** Kevin Seddon, president
- **Business:** Home inspection
- **Corporate office:** 604 S. 16th St., Oxford, Miss.
- **Local Franchises:** Olive Branch, (662) 404-6631, Memphis 753-5858, Oxford, Miss. (662) 236-1232
- **Web site:** www.homeSafeInspection.com

"Being able to see through one more layer is a tremendous advantage."

— Peng Lee

ceiling, through our technology, we can tell you if it's an active leak or track the moisture back to its source. A drop of water will show."

Last week, drops of water showed as dark blobs in a steady dribble from the front door to the kitchen at Susan and Phil Fentress's home in East Memphis.

Lee expected it was saliva from a family dog.

"Being able to see through one more layer is a tremendous advantage," Lee said.

The Fentresses hired HomeSafe to make an infrared swoop of their 2,800-square-foot home.

"We've done a quite a bit of renovation, and we don't really know if the electrical work was done cor-

rectly," Susan Fentress said.

Wiring in the downstairs bathroom showed up perfectly — running in a straight, glowing line from outlet to fixture — and cool, too.

The studs in the walls were as even and strong as ribs in the ark. No water was accumulating or had accumulated under the sinks.

But Lee found what looked like mice nests in the ceiling, a widening moisture seepage in a downstairs closet and loose insulation, accounting for what the Fentresses say are high MLG&W bills.

The technology works by reading heat-absorption levels, showing a hot white glow where electricity escapes harmlessly around light sockets. In a corner, the clothes dryer — cooling after a load of wash — glowed like small refrigerator with the door left open.

It took Lee and another technician 2½ hours to inspect the home, which included a thermal scan, a visual inspection and an acoustic scan.

In a year, Seddon has sold 30 franchises in the tri-state area — including three doing business in Shelby County — plus a scattering of outlets in Alabama, Florida and Oklahoma in a business he expects to break wide open.

In three years, he estimates HomeSafe will have more than 200 franchises, based on sales now. Each franchisee must be certified by the American Society of Home Inspectors and complete HomeSafe's six-day training.

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